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A Brief Chronicle



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Joseph Conrad
As a European caricature artist sees him

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JOSEPH CONRAD, rover of the seven seas, has never been to America. The first voyage of his sea-life took him to the West Indies in 1875 in the old French sailing ship, *Mont Blanc*. The last projected voyage, in the winter of '94, was to carry him to Canada, but the *S. Adowa* (2,000 tons) never found the emigrants to fill her cabins.

For years Mr. Conrad has wanted to come to this country. He was prevented by work, by ill health, finally by the war. His visit now is at the first break possible (after completing his new novel, "The Rover"). He needs rest and change, and for his holiday he selects America, perhaps because Americans first gave general recognition to his work. In America, of all countries, he has had from the start his largest audience. More than six books and many of his short stories were published first in this country, and his manuscripts (the majority of them, according to report) are held here. He counts here many close friends. At last he is coming.

There is no secret that his own varied adventures were the material for many of his books. Conrad was born on December 6, 1857, in Ukraine, one of the southern provinces of old Poland, into a distinguished Polish family named Korzeniowski. He was christened Teodor Josef

Konrad Korzeniowski. At the time of his birth, the atmosphere in Poland was intense with oppressed patriotism. It was the era of Russian oppression at its worst.

Just before the ill-starred uprising against Russia in 1863, his father, who had been deeply implicated in the earlier rebellion of 1831, was banished to exile, whither his mother followed voluntarily with young Conrad. His first recollection of his mother is of the time just before their banishment, when he was five years old. They were living in Warsaw, where they had moved in 1861, to take their place as leaders in the coming movement.

Of the patriots assembled in his father's house, Conrad says: "Among them I remember my mother, a more familiar figure than the others, dressed in the black of the national mourning, worn in defiance of ferocious police regulations. I have also preserved from that particular time the awe of her mysterious gravity, which was indeed by no means smileless. For I remember her smiles, too. Perhaps for me she could always find a smile. She was young then, certainly not thirty yet. She died four years later in exile."

After a year in exile, his mother had become so seriously ill that she applied to St. Petersburg for permission to return to her brother's house in Poland, in the hope that the change to the southern climate would save her. She took the boy Conrad, who was then seven, with her. When the three months' leave was over, her health was not improved, and she applied for an extension of leave. Not only was the request refused, but a high police officer was detailed to see that she left on the day appointed for her departure. His orders were to convey her forcibly to the military hospital in Kiev if she pleaded illness as an excuse for staying in Poland. A few months later, in 1865, she died.

Conrad remembers her death. He remembers his father, greatly saddened and weakened in health, giving

him his first training in the French and English classics, of which the elder was an eminent Polish translator. He remembers being sent back to his uncle's ("as soon as my father could brace himself for the separation") and enjoying there the only three happy years of his childhood. Here he played with his young cousins and came under the influence of the French governess who had taught him to speak and to read French during the three months of his previous visit with his mother.

Then, in 1868, his father was allowed to return from exile on the ground that he was too ill to be dangerous any longer. He carried off the young Conrad to Cracow, the old Polish capital, seat of classical learning and historical relics. Here the boy went to the best preparatory school, the gymnasium of St. Anne, as a day student. Although not an ordinary boy, he was very popular, due to his ability to spin the most fascinating yarns. In less than a year and a half his father was dead. The vivid impression of these last eighteen months with his austere and heart-broken father stands fixed in Conrad's memory. The shadow of death hovered over the house for endless months, and the high-strung boy, who was not yet twelve, awaited the inevitable with incredulous terror. "I don't know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy. My study finished, I would have had nothing to do but sit and watch the awful stillness of the sick-room flow out through the closed door and coldly enfold my scared heart. I suppose that in a futile, childish way I would have gone crazy. But I was a reading boy and there were many books lying about. . . ."

He had begun to read at the age of five, and by the time he was ten had read widely in Victor Hugo, and other French writers (in French), and in Polish translation, Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray, history, novels, voyages. He first read by instinct, by an inborn love of books, and later, through necessity, as the consciousness of the op-

pression of his country and the sadness of his own life began to stifle him with its atmosphere of hopelessness. He had passed three years in the darkness of exile, had witnessed the death of both his father and mother (both victims of oppression), and he knew that their parents before them had suffered equally in their struggle for freedom.

Even in those comparatively happy years in Ukraine, his desire of freedom, of breathing space, had expressed itself. At the age of nine, looking at the map of Africa, he had put his finger on the blank space which at that time represented the mysterious, unexplored heart of the continent, and said:

"When I grow up, I shall go there."

Over twenty years later, he did, to Stanley Falls. Indeed, the mysterious heart of that continent may stand as the romantic symbol of Conrad's life. The determination to go there is inevitably associated with the sea, and the fever he contracted in the Congo sent him back to the land, to lead the sedentary, if no less arduous, life of the novelist.

As a boy, Conrad loved to tell stories. He told them to his friends, for hours at a time. He dreamed them. The faculty of convincing tales, fed by his reading and his active imagination, seemed to be born in him. Always he dreamed of going to sea. His stories were of ships, and the sea, and far away countries—which he had never seen. But he kept his peace, and it was not until he was fifteen that he first spoke aloud his desire to go to sea. His desire? It was certainly more than that. It was everything. That characteristic inability which he says has never allowed him to turn back from a course once decided on, had already guaranteed the reality of the event.

Yet it was not a trivial thing. "There was no precedent," he writes. "I verily believe mine was the only

case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing broad jump out of his racial surroundings and associations." Of all the cities of Europe, none was so remote from the sea and its associations as Cracow, and Poland itself, with no maritime connections, no seaport, was an agricultural country exclusively.

Perhaps, he intimates, the whole country was not convulsed by his desire to go to sea. "But for a boy between fifteen and sixteen," he writes in recalling the difficulties of that time, "sensitive enough, in all conscience, the commotion of his little world seemed a very considerable thing indeed. So considerable indeed, that, absurdly enough, the echoes of it linger to this day. I catch myself in hours of solitude and retrospect meeting arguments and charges made by voices now forever still; finding things to say that an assailed boy could not have found, simply because of the mysteriousness of his impulses to himself."

His uncle, who had become his guardian, journeyed all the way from Ukraine to Cracow to investigate at first hand the root of the disturbance which had made itself felt over several provinces. But there was no question of Conrad's sincerity, and after several serious talks which sealed forever their friendship, the uncle decided he must not have the boy later on reproach him for having ruined his life by an unconditioned opposition. "Meantime, take the best place you can in your examinations, and we shall see. . . ."

And in the summer of 1873, on the Furca Pass, "with the peaks of the Bernes Oberland for mute and solemn witnesses," it happened. The term over, Conrad and his tutor, a young student at Cracow University, who had proved his devotion to the boy by two years of unremitting and arduous care, were sent on a "jolly holiday," a tramp through the valley of the Reuss, along the Upper Danube to the Falls of the Rhine. But before they had journeyed far, one of the trampers received a well-

founded conviction that the other had been entrusted with the malicious mission of arguing him out of his "romantic folly."

"He had taken his mission to heart so well," Conrad remembers, "that I began to feel crushed before we reached Zurich. He argued in railway trains, in lake steamboats, he argued away for me the obligatory sunrise on the Righi, by Jove!

"I could not hate him, but he had been crushing me slowly, and when he started to argue on the top of the Furca Pass he was perhaps nearer to success than either he or I imagined. I listened to him in despairing silence, feeling that ghostly, unrealized, and desired sea of my dreams escape from my unnerved will.

"We sat down by the side of the road to continue the argument begun half a mile before. Without the power of reply, I listened with my eyes fixed obstinately on the ground. A stir in the road made me look up and then I saw my unforgettable Englishman. . . ."

It was settled! The Englishman was comic. He was ridiculous. He had on knickers and short socks with his calves exposed to the public gaze and to the tonic air of high altitudes, dazzling the eye of the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. . . . He was the leader of a small caravan. . . .

"His glance, his smile, the unextinguishable and comic ardour of his striving forward appearance helped me to pull myself together.

"The argument went on. What reward could I expect from such a life at the end of my years, either in ambition, honour, or conscience? An unanswerable question. But I felt no longer crushed. Then our eyes met. . . .

"'You are an incorrigible, hopeless Don Quixote. That's what you are,' said my tutor.

"There was no more question of that mysterious vocation between us or anyone else. . . . Eleven years later, month for month, I stood on Tower Hill on the steps of St. Katherine's Dockhouse, a master in the British Merchant Service. But the man who put his hand on my shoulder on the top of Furca Pass was no longer living. . . ."

CONRAD AND THE SEA

1874-1894

"If a seaman, then an English seaman," Conrad had resolved, though he didn't know a word of English at the time. French he knew perfectly, and when his uncle was able to make negotiations with some friends in Marseilles, to keep an eye on the young man and give him a sort of introduction to the ways of the sea, Conrad welcomed the means and kept his own counsel about the end.

The very first day he ever spent on salt water was by invitation in a big, half-decked pilot boat, cruising under close reefs on the look-out, in misty blowing weather, for the sails of ships and the smoke of steamers rising out beyond the tall Planier lighthouse, cutting the line of the wind-swept horizon with a white perpendicular stroke. "They were hospitable souls, these sturdy Provençal seamen," he recalls with affection. "Many a night and day I spent cruising with these rough, kindly men under whose auspices my intimacy with the sea began, dodging under the lee of Château d'If and Monte Cristo."

On the last turn of duty he made with these pilots (in December of 1874), he first laid his hand against the side of an English ship. She was a big, high-class cargo steamer of a type that is met on the sea no more, and her name was *James Westoll*.

As he drew up to the ship in the dinghy in which he was pulling bow, he heard himself addressed for the first time

in English, the speech of his secret choice, of his future, of long friendships, and deepest affections. The address was brief and unbeautiful. It was growled out by an immense, bearded, double-chinned "porpoise" on the deck above.

"Look out there."

Conrad caught the line tossed down to him. In a minute their work was done, the pilot had swarmed up the rope ladder, and when he put his hand against the ship to shove off, he felt her already throbbing under his open palm! The head of the *James Westoll* swung a little to the west. Before she had gone a quarter of a mile, she hoisted her flag as the harbour regulations prescribe for arriving and departing ships. . . .

"I saw it suddenly flicker and stream out on the flag-staff. The Red Ensign! In the pellucid colourless atmosphere bathing the drab and gray masses of that southern land as far as the eye could reach. . . . it was the only spot of ardent colour, flame-like, intense, and presently as minute as the tiny red spark reflected from a great fire in the heart of a globe of crystal. The Red Ensign—the symbolic, protecting warm bit of bunting flung wide upon the seas and destined for so many years to be the only roof over my head."

Three years later, in May of 1878, Conrad first set foot on English soil, at Lowestoft. He could not speak a word of English. He had spent the better part of three years in French ships, had sailed twice to the West Indies, and had found adventure in Marseilles sufficient to last a more easily satisfied youth for a life-time. But he would not present himself to the British Merchant Service "in an altogether green state."

A local boat-builder at Lowestoft who understood French helped him to pick up a little English. The region of the English east coast was his training ground. For five months he shipped on board a Lowestoft coaster, the

Skimmer of the Seas, trading between that port and Newcastle. "My teachers," Conrad admits, not without pride, "were the sailors of the Norfolk shore; coast men with steady eyes, mighty limbs, and gentle voice; men of very few words, which, at least, were never bare of meaning. Honest, strong, steady men, sobered by domestic ties, one and all. On many a night I have hauled braces under the shadow of that coast, envying, as sailors will, the people on the shore sleeping quietly in their beds within sound of the sea."

Then, after five months of this wearisome training (he had already been three years at sea), he deemed himself fit to be presented to the British Merchant Service. He learned of a man in London with a willingness and (which is more) an ability to procure ships for idle sailors—after some discreet circumvention of an Act of Parliament. Anxiously conceived and laboriously executed, a letter was written, Conrad's first composition in the English language. He followed it to London in a few days, and on a hazy day in early September in the year 1878, a strange young seaman of twenty stepped out of Liverpool station onto the streets of London for the first time in his life. "I was elated," he says. "I was pursuing a clear aim. I was carrying out a deliberate plan of making out of myself, in the first place, a seaman worthy of the service, good enough to work by the side of the men with whom I was to live; and in the second place, I had to justify my existence to myself, to redeem a tacit moral pledge.

"From that point of view—Youth and a straightforward scheme of conduct—it was certainly a year of grace. All the help I had to get in touch with the world which I was invading was a piece of paper not much bigger than the palm of my hand—in which I held it—torn out of a larger plan of London for the greater facility of reference. It had been the object of careful study for some days past. The fact that I could take a conveyance at the

station never occurred to my mind, no, not even when I got out into the street, and stood, taking my anxious bearings, in the midst, so to speak, of twenty thousand handsoms. A strange absence of mind or an unconscious conviction that one cannot approach an important moment of one's life by means of a hired carriage?"

But he found his way, simply from the topography of that chart (an ability, he points out, which later stood him in good stead in regions of intricate navigation), and became, as planned, an English seaman. His ship was the crack wool clipper, *Duke of Sutherland*, bound for Australia, and in October, 1878, he sailed in her as able seaman before the mast. Of that first crew of eighteen men, all were English save Conrad, a Norwegian, two Americans, and a St. Kitts Negro called James Wait—a name used just twenty years later for the Negro of "The Nigger of the *Narcissus*."

It was nearly three years before he was back in London, after encircling the globe. On the return voyage he was promoted to third officer. He lost no time in presenting himself to the Marine Board at St. Katherine's Dock-house for examination for second mate. A frightful ordeal. The examination (an oral one before an old sea captain who seemed to have lost all idea of time) was endless. Other good men had been "plucked" in a quarter of the time. But Conrad wasn't plucked. He emerged three hours later, to tread over the atmosphere surrounding Tower Hill, the proudest moment of his sea life.

Was it luck or some mal-intending demon which arranged to get him the berth for Bangkok on the seedy, super-annuated *Palestine* ("Judea. London. Doe or Die.")? At any rate, it was luck to Conrad. His first voyage as Second Mate. An altogether memorable affair. It began in 1881. His first voyage to the East and his skipper's first command. The ship, about 400 tons, was all rust, dust, grime aloft, dirt on deck. They struck

the famous October gale of 1881. They sank, nearly, twice, before they finally got started, they caught on fire in the Indian Ocean, and had to put off in open boats. . . .

Did they get to Bangkok? Well, not quite. But Java. It sufficed, especially when you have been days on end in an open boat, your head bared to the scorching sun and the salt lash of the sea's fury. An occasion worthy of the story that enshrines it—"Youth."

There were to be three more eastern voyages in the years that followed, long passages, the longest an interminable one of one hundred and thirty days, a bad passage. . . . But not one of them without its rich return in stories told. Conrad was Second Officer on the voyage around the Cape which makes the epic story of "The Nigger of the *Narcissus*."

There were days, almost every day, when death was a very real hazard, hovering like a hawk, ready to strike its unwary prey in a moment of relaxed vigilance.

"Sometimes we had to drop everything," he speaks of a particularly bad voyage around the Cape, "and cling with both hands to the swaying spars, holding our breath in fear of a terribly heavy roll. And, wallowing as if she meant to turn over with us, the bark, her decks full of water, her gear flying in bights, ran at some ten knots an hour. We had been driven far south, much farther than we had intended to go.

"Suddenly, up there in the slings of the foreyard, in the midst of our work, I felt my shoulder gripped with such force in the carpenter's powerful paw that I positively yelled with unexpected pain. The man's eyes stared close in my face, and he shouted, 'Look, sir! Look! What's this?'

"At first I saw nothing. The sea was one empty wilderness of black-and-white hills. Suddenly, half-concealed in the tumult of the foaming rollers, I made out

awash, something enormous, rising and falling—something spread out like a burst of foam, but with a more bluish, more solid look.

“It was a piece of an ice-floe. . . . floating lower than any raft, right in our way, as if ambushed among the waves with murderous intent. There was no time to get down on deck. I shouted from aloft until my head was ready to split. I was heard aft, and we managed to clear the sunken floe which had come all the way from the southern ice-cap to have a try at our unsuspecting lives. Had it been an hour later, nothing could have saved the ship, for no eye could have made out in the dusk that pale piece of ice swept over the white-crested waves. . . .

“I am, perhaps, unduly sensitive,” he remarks of this and a score of other similar affairs in the routine of the sea, “but I confess that the idea of being suddenly spilled into an infuriated ocean in the midst of darkness and uproar affected me always with a sensation of shrinking distaste. To be drowned in a pond, though it might be called an ignominious fate by the ignorant, is yet a bright and peaceful ending to some other endings to one’s earthly career which I have mentally quaked at in the intervals, or even in the midst, of violent exertions.”

A quaking of a different sort affected Conrad on his fourth and last voyage to the East, in 1884. The run was Amsterdam to Samarang in Java. Conrad was twenty-four, and elated. He was First Mate for the first time, in a good ship, the *Highland Forest*. The cargo, frozen up the river, finally arrived, and shortly after he had finished what seemed a very careful job of loading, his captain arrived, and the ship put out to sea.

But ships, like men, require humouring, and the young first mate could not know the particular humours of the *Highland Forest*. He had loaded her to make her stable, and he got her, stable. After this experience he had a very solid respect for a ship’s cargo, for he says:

"Neither before nor since have I felt a ship roll so abruptly, so violently, so heavily. Once she began, you felt that she would never stop, and this hopeless sensation characterizing the motion of ships whose centre of gravity is brought down too low in loading made everyone on board weary of keeping on his feet. I remember once hearing one of the hands say: 'By Heavens! Jack! I feel as if I don't mind how soon I let myself go, and let the blamed hooker knock my brains out if she likes.'

"Down south, running before the gales of high latitudes, she made our life a burden to us. There were days when nothing would keep even on the swing tables. She rolled and rolled with an awful dislodging jerk and that dizzily fast sweep of her masts on every swing. It was a wonder that the men aloft were not flung off the yards, the yards flung off the masts, the masts flung overboard. The captain in his arm-chair holding on grimly at the head of the table, with the soup-tureen rolling on one side of the cabin, and the steward sprawling on the other, would observe, looking at me: 'There's your stable loading.' . . .

"It was only poetic justice that the chief mate, who had made a mistake about the distribution of his ship's cargo, an excusable mistake, perhaps, should pay the penalty. A piece of one of the minor spars did carry away and flew against his back, sending him sliding on his face for quite a considerable distance along the main-deck. . . ."

This accident was serious enough to cause Conrad to leave the ship at Java, where he crossed over to Singapore, and was in the hospital for many weeks. When recovered he took a berth (there was no reason to go straight home) as chief officer in the *Vidar*, a steam ship, belonging to some rich Arabs in the Straits Settlement. Before leaving London for the voyage in the *Highland Forest*, he had passed for his master's (captain's) certificate in 1884, the year of his naturalization, at the age of twenty-six. But a certificate does not mean a com-

mand, and he was glad to get the berth as chief mate.

The East, with its promise and its mystery, was waiting for him. He guided the *Vidar* for two years across that "magic circle" of the Malay Archipelago and the Gulf of Siam. Here he met Almayer, and his special *bête noir*, the unfortunate Willems, Captain Tom Lingard, and Heyst. For six of his novels and even more short stories, his mind was to travel back, in after years, to this core of the East. The *Vidar* traded on the coasts of Borneo and Celebes and took him far afield to the Sulu Sea. Borneo was a savage wilderness inhabited by warring tribes. Squalid settlements, high on stilts, were crowded into the water by the surrounding jungle. A trip to Jupiter might have been more awe-inspiring, but scarcely more fascinating than the adventures of these two years.

Then suddenly, without warning, he chucked his job. He was through with the *Vidar*, and as it turned out, with Malaysia. He informed his captain he wanted to leave; next day he was paid off. The good captain was distressed no end. He had never had such a satisfactory first mate. But Conrad's mind was set. There was nothing to hold him. He said he wanted to go home. In reality, he wanted to "get on." Certainly he was from conviction, perhaps, disenchanted.

And by the merest piece of luck, before he had even unpacked his luggage in the hotel, or thought of making arrangements for the voyage home, his first command was presented to him. He was dazed. He had to pinch himself to realize his luck. And then it came to him—"A ship! My ship! She was mine, more absolutely mine for possession and care than anything in the world; an object of responsibility and devotion. She was there waiting for me, spell-bound, unable to move, to live, to get out into the world (till I came), like an enchanted princess. Her call had come to me as if from the clouds, I had never suspected her existence. I didn't know how

she looked. I had barely heard her name, and yet we were indissolubly united for a certain portion of our future, to sink or swim together." He was twenty-seven.

The barque *Otago*, when he saw her, was small and trim, resting at her quay among the line of heavy ships, like an Arab steed in a row of cart horses. He came to love her well, after he had paced her paralyzed form for seventeen sleepless days and nights, becalmed in the Gulf of Siam, his whole crew stricken with fever. In her he crossed the shadow line of youth.

But he lived to make some brilliant passages in the *Otago* in the Indian Ocean from 1887 to 1889. Finally, in March of the latter year, he resigned his command and went home to London. Perhaps it was time to get on. Certainly it was time for a holiday. But idleness soon began to pall, and translated itself into a most curious kind of activity.

In a small lodging house in Bessborough Gardens about a month after he had returned home (in the autumn of '89), he sat down one morning, and with no actually admitted or conscious design, began to evoke the shades of a certain Almayer of Malaya, his wife, and the beautiful Nina. Once more his fate was sealed. One day he would leave the sea and the ships of his choice.

"Till I began to write that novel," he says, "I had written nothing but letters, and not very many of these. I had never made a note of a fact, of an impression, or of an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write; literary ambition had never entered the world of my imaginings.

"But for many years Almayer and the world of his story had been the companions of my imagination, without, I hope, impairing my ability to deal with the realities of sea life. I had had the man and his surroundings with me ever since my return from eastern waters—

some four years before the morning I began to write.

"It was in the front sitting room of furnished apartments in a Pimlico square that they first began to live again with a vividness and a poignancy quite foreign to our former real intercourse. They did not clamour aloud for my attention. They came with a silent and irresistible appeal—and the appeal, I affirm here, was not to my self-love or to my vanity. It seems now to have had a moral character, for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure, sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers of this earth? . . . After all these years, each leaving its evidence of slowly blackened pages, I can honestly say that it is a sentiment akin to pity which prompted me to render in words assembled with conscientious care the memory of things forever distant and of men who had lived."

But the book so begun in the autumn of 1889 had to penetrate the heart of Africa (in fulfillment of the early prophecy), to travel the high seas for two years and more, and make two trips across the European continent before its yellowing bulk found a permanent rest, and suitable reception with the publishing house of T. Fisher Unwin in 1894.

Conrad's African experience (much of it is faithfully presented in "Heart of Darkness," considered by many critics to be Conrad's masterpiece) is best described by the word "ghastly." The prophecy of his boyhood did not take into account the fact that he should be carried away from "there," deathly ill with a fever which gave him good cause to wish himself dead many times over, from the effects of which he has never fully recovered. "Almayer's Folly" went with him to Africa, the seven chapters then in existence, and refused to be lost when

practically all the rest of his luggage was dumped into the Congo. It accompanied him to Geneva, and in the convalescence following his long illness, the eighth chapter was completed. This was in 1890, when he later made his first pilgrimage back to Ukraine.

The manuscript followed him to sea again on the ship *Torrens*, the voyage to Australia where the young Cambridge student, Jacques, became its first reader. When asked by the dubious author whether it was worth going on with, he made the memorable reply, both emphatic and succinct: "Distinctly." On this ship, the *Torrens*, Conrad later made the acquaintance of Mr. John Galsworthy "for some forty days in the Indian Ocean."

The tenth chapter of "Almayer's Folly" was begun in the second mate's cabin of the steamship *Adowa*, tied up to a quay in Rouen in the grip of the wintry weather. But the ship which was bound for Canada on what would have been Conrad's first voyage to America never left port. The emigrants who were to fill her cabins never materialized.

That was the end of Conrad's sea-going. He put out for Poland (with "Almayer's Folly" in his hand bag) on a last visit to his uncle, "Mr. T. B.," the guardian of his youth, and the well-beloved friend to whom the book was later dedicated. We have a glimpse of the still incomplete manuscript being lost in the Berlin railway station, but when we see it again, it is between covers, and in type, issued at six shillings, about \$1.50—where all may read. But that was in '95. The price of the same edition now, unfortunately, is about \$70.00.

CONRAD'S WRITING LIFE

"Almayer's Folly" was published in both England and America in 1895. There was no sensation at the time, though no longer ago than yesterday the book was called

"a work of absolute genius." In 1896, Conrad was married and went to live in Kent, where he has resided in comparative seclusion ever since. He has two sons, Borys, who enlisted in 1914 at the age of sixteen and served in France throughout the war, and John, who is still attending "prep" school. His wife, Jessie Conrad, recently brought out "A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House," with a testimonial preface by "a modest but grateful Living Example of her practice."

Conrad is not a great traveler, or a mixer in any social or literary set. For one reason he hasn't time. People go to see him at his home not far from Canterbury, but many more go than should. A remark that throws much light on his character and simplicity is one he made to a friend not many months ago. "I am worried," he said. "I haven't much time. There are two or three more tales I want to tell. But my strength is weak and the time short." His health is independable. He has never been able to shake off the effects of the African fever, and he works tirelessly, at great strain.

In the maturity of his writing life, Conrad has nevertheless continued to live with his youth. His books are his youth brought to life. "It seems that he not only had a memory, but also that he knew how to remember," as Conrad himself comments on the unnamed author of the delicate and almost private pages of "The Arrow of Gold."

Almayer with his famous flock of geese, the only geese on the Archipelago, had come first. Almayer naturally suggested Willems, so Willems, "An Outcast of the Islands" came second, reluctant, as he would, vivid enough, but reticent, stubborn. In the intervals between the longer work, he recalled the earliest short stories, "Karain," "The Lagoon," bits of treasure chipped from the glowing ruby of the East. He worked almost incessantly for three years, retreading the mysterious rivers, the se-

ductive, terrifying jungles of the East. It is not curious that their brilliant colouring, superimposed upon the drab canvas of the unchanging sea, should be ready cream to be skimmed from the solid depths beneath. Captain Tom Lingard's story, the belated "Rescue," had its fast commencement in this period, only to be set aside for the growing and increasingly irresistible desire to pay his tribute to the ships and the old sea, to which he yet felt drawn, and to which, not without heartburn, could he bid the last farewell.

He gave them their tribute in "The Nigger of the *Narcissus*," his epic of "the ships, the seamen, the winds, and the great sea, the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life." It was a ship-load of well-loved men. James Wait came back from the old *Duke of Sutherland*, demanding to be the centre of the story. Old Singleton, whom he had known many years later on the *Torrens*, must have his place. They were friends, all, who made the unforgettable passage in the *Narcissus*. "Good-bye, brothers! Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives? You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale." Henceforth, Conrad knew he had to be a writer. He had done with the sea.

Lord Jim came—out of the East—with his tale of tragic success. Slowly the story was built. The ship *Platna*, the pivot of the story, was on everyone's tongue at one time in the Archipelago. . . . "Youth," his youth, back it came in the *Palestine*, "the old rattletrap, the test of life."

Then he made his greatest attempt, and, in many respects, his greatest achievement, "Nostromo," a canvas for Olympian painters. For twenty months, "neglecting the common joys of life that fall to the lot of the humblest

on this earth," he worked. . . . And here is the contradiction—would any one believe Conrad had never seen Costaguana, the Placid Gulf, Sulacco? (The scene is the west coast of South America.) He had spent a few months in the West Indies in his earliest youth at sea, and had later made two flying visits to South American ports, visits extending perhaps twelve hours in all—and the rest he got from the descriptions in an old book of his childhood!

It seems incredible that during the eight years between 1895 and 1903, when Conrad was writing the stories referred to above, the published books were presented to an indifferent, as if perfectly unconscious, public. When one launches boulders into the sea, one expects a ruffle of some sort. Those were days, one may well imagine, of patience and faith. Not entirely without their very special and intimate satisfactions. But a writer wants to be read, and it was not until as late as 1914 (that is difficult to believe now), with the publication of "Chance," that the public rose, as one has seen them in moving picture houses, to express their praise in very audible appreciation. The previous volume of tales, "Twixt Land and Sea" had met a most respectable reception, but "Chance" found a welcome, which, however belated, it is even to this day pleasant to recall.

After "Chance" there was no more question about Conrad's audience. "Victory" was completed during the first months of the war, and published in 1915. The decision by the critics that it was one of Conrad's finest artistic achievements is especially interesting in view of the fact that he went back for its setting to the scene of his earliest books, Heyst's "magic circle" of the Archipelago.

The story of "The Shadow Line," his next book, had been one of Conrad's proudest memories for years. It was the harrowing voyage of his first command, becalmed in the Gulf of Siam, and as he says, it was not a

trifling effort of memory "for a youngster of sixty" to catch in the pages of the book the freshness and simplicity of youth. In "The Arrow of Gold" which followed, the effort was even greater. This fragile chapter of his youth had been locked in his heart for a long stretch of forty years before he found the key to release it.

He was fast paying debts that had never left his mind while other special goals were occupying him. The last he could not escape. A number of chapters of "The Rescue" had been in his desk since 1897, never completely forgotten or relinquished. With a quarter of a century's growth intervening, he set to work to renew his old-time friendship with Captain Tom Lingard and Mrs. Travers.

In the process of "tidying up," Conrad published "Notes on Life and Letters" in 1921, a volume of self-revelatory papers on books, men, and personal contacts full of important lights for the student of Conrad. It is his only collection of essays, and the chapter on "Poland Revisited" is an unforgettable episode in his life.

Conrad's new novel, his first in three years, will have book publication in the fall under the title of "The Rover." The story concerns Peyrol, an old free lance of the sea, who comes home to his native France to become involved for the greatest adventure of his life in the Napoleonic naval contest with England.

